

## CLAIMS

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

- 1 1. A method for developing an order for a product, comprising:  
2       establishing an order for a product, wherein said order includes a first  
3       component associated with said product and said order includes a non-binding  
4       attribute associated with said first component;  
5       determining a second component that satisfies said non-binding attribute  
6       for said order; and  
7       exchanging said first component with said second component in said  
8       order.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein said order comprises a legal contract.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein said establishing an order for a product includes  
2 at least one of the following:  
3       providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding  
4       attribute;  
5       receiving an order for said product;  
6       allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product,  
7       wherein said first component is one of said plurality of components;  
8       allowing a customer to select said product and said non-binding attribute;  
9       providing a notification to a customer regarding said first component and  
10       said second component and receiving consent from said customer to said non-  
11       binding attribute;  
12       providing at least two options regarding at least one component for said  
13       product and allowing a customer to select from among said two options; and

14 providing a request to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute  
15 associated with said first component.

1 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2 determining a need for said first component outside said order;

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein said determining a need for said first component  
2 outside said order includes at least one of the following:

3 receiving a notification regarding a new order that requires said first  
4 component;

5 determining that said order cannot be completely fulfilled due to a  
6 shortage of said first component;

7 receiving a new order that requires an amount of said first component such  
8 that both said order and said new order cannot be filled if both said order and said  
9 new order use said first component;

10 determining that said order cannot be partially or completely filled due to  
11 defects detected in said first component;

12 determining that a change in price for said first component makes it  
13 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

14 determining that a change in price for a second component makes it  
15 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

16 determining that a change in projected supply for said first component  
17 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

18 determining that a change in projected supply for a second component  
19 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

20 determining that a projected change in price for said first component  
21 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

22 determining that a projected change in price for a second component  
23 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

24 establishing a new order that requires said first component; and  
25 receiving an indication of a potential new order that requires said first  
26 component.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein said determining a second component that  
2 satisfies said non-binding attribute for said order includes at least one of the following:  
3 identifying a component that can replace said first component in said  
4 product and satisfy said non-binding attribute;  
5 selecting said second component from a plurality of components identified  
6 in said order as replacements for said first component;  
7 receiving a notification of a selection of said second component;  
8 providing a notification of availability of said second component;  
9 receiving a request to exchange said first component with said second  
10 component;  
11 receiving consent to exchange said first component with said second  
12 component;  
13 providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that  
14 satisfies said non-binding attribute;  
15 confirming availability of said second component; and  
16 confirming ability of said second component to satisfy said non-binding  
17 attribute.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein said exchanging said first component with said  
2 second component in said order includes at least one of the following:  
3 using said second component but not said first component when building  
4 said product;  
5 fulfilling said order using said second component but not said first  
6 component;

7                   using said second component but not said first component when providing  
8           said product; and  
9                   including said second component in said product.

1    8.       The method of claim 1, wherein said non-binding attribute relates to at least one  
2    of the following:

3                   a quality level of said first component;  
4                   a performance level of said first component;  
5                   a feature set of said first component;  
6                   a delivery date for said first component;  
7                   a color of said first component;  
8                   a size of said first component;  
9                   a storage capacity of said first component;  
10                  a bandwidth of said first component;  
11                  a weight of said first component;  
12                  a technical capability of said first component;  
13                  an expiration date;  
14                  a purity level;  
15                  a service level;  
16                  a warranty level;  
17                  a price; and  
18                  a dimension associated with said first component.

1    9.       The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2                   providing a notification regarding said exchanging said first component  
3                   with said second component.

1    10.      The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2                   fulfilling said order using said second component.

- 1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging  
3 said first component with said second component.
- 1 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:  
2 providing a notification regarding said price.
- 1 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 establishing a second order using said first component.
- 1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein said order is established with a first customer  
2 and said second order is established with a second customer.
- 1 15. The method of claim 1, wherein said order identifies at least one characteristic  
2 associated with said product.
- 1 16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:  
2 receiving identification of said at least one characteristic regarding said  
3 order.
- 1 17. The method of claim 15, further comprising:  
2 determining said second component based, at least in part, on said  
3 characteristic.
- 1 18. The method of claim 15, further comprising:  
2 determining said non-binding attribute based, at least in part, on said  
3 characteristic.

1 19. The method of claim 15, wherein said determining a second component that  
2 satisfies said non-binding attribute for said order includes selecting said second  
3 component based, at last in part, on said characteristic.

1 20. The method of claim 15, wherein said at least one characteristic includes at least  
2 one of the following:

- 3 an acceptable lower bound of said at least one characteristic;  
4 an acceptable upper bound of said at least one characteristic;  
5 a range of acceptable characteristics;  
6 a range of unacceptable characteristics;  
7 a rule regarding exchange of said first component with said second  
8 component;  
9 a condition that must be met if said first component is exchanged with said  
10 second component;  
11 a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said product;  
12 a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said first component;  
13 a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said second component;  
14 a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said product;  
15 a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said first component;  
16 and  
17 a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said second component.

1 21. The method of claim 15, further comprising:  
2 identifying said at least one characteristic.

1 22. The method of claim 15, wherein said at least one characteristic is based on at  
2 least one of the following:

- 3 volume of said product included in said order;  
4 quantity of said product included in said order;

5                   quality of said product;  
6                   quality of said first component;  
7                   quality of said second component;  
8                   demand for said product;  
9                   demand for said first component;  
10                  demand for said second component;  
11                  supply for said product;  
12                  supply for said first component;  
13                  supply for said second component;  
14                  availability of said first component;  
15                  availability of said second component;  
16                  an amount in inventory of said product;  
17                  an amount in inventory of said first component;  
18                  an amount in inventory of said second component;  
19                  an expected profit margin for said product wherein said product includes  
20                  said first component;  
21                  an expected profit margin for said product wherein said product includes  
22                  said second component;  
23                  a discount available for said product;  
24                  a price of said product;  
25                  a price of said first component;  
26                  a price of said second component  
27                  projected demand for said product;  
28                  projected demand for said first component;  
29                  projected demand for said second component;  
30                  projected supply for said product;  
31                  projected supply for said first component;  
32                  projected supply for said second component;  
33                  projected availability of said first component;

34 projected availability of said second component;  
35 projected amount in inventory of said product;  
36 projected amount in inventory of said first component;  
37 projected amount in inventory of said second component;  
38 a projected price of said product;  
39 a projected price of said first component; and  
40 a projected price of said second component.

1 23. The method of claim 15, wherein said characteristic is identified by at least one of  
2 the following:

3 a party placing said order;  
4 a supplier of said product;  
5 a supplier of said first component;  
6 a supplier of said second component;  
7 an expert system;  
8 a rule-based system;  
9 a supply chain management decision support system;  
10 a supplier relationship management decision support system;  
11 a production control decision support system;  
12 a forecasting system;  
13 an optimization system;  
14 an order model; and  
15 a customer model.

1 24. The method of claim 1, wherein said order specifies different prices for different  
2 configurations of said product.

1 25. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 determining said non-binding attribute.



- 1 26. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 providing said product.
- 1 27. A method for fulfilling an order for a product, comprising:  
2 establishing an order, wherein said order identifies an initial configuration  
3 for a product and at least one non-binding attribute associated with said initial  
4 configuration;  
5 after said order is established, determining an alternate configuration for  
6 said product in accordance with said at least one non-binding attribute; and  
7 fulfilling said order in accordance with said alternate configuration.
- 1 28. The method of claim 27, wherein said establishing an order includes at least one  
2 of the following:  
3 providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding  
4 attribute;  
5 receiving an order for said product from a customer;  
6 receiving a request from a customer for said product in said initial  
7 configuration;  
8 allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product;  
9 allowing a customer to select said product and said non-binding attribute;  
10 allowing a customer to select said product and said initial configuration;  
11 providing a notification to a customer regarding said initial configuration  
12 and receiving consent from said customer to said non-binding attribute;  
13 providing at least two options regarding said initial configuration for said  
14 product and allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options;  
15 providing at least two options regarding at least one component for said  
16 product and allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options;  
17 providing at least two options regarding said non-binding attribute and  
18 allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options; and

19 providing a request to a customer regarding said non-binding attribute.

1 29. The method of claim 27, wherein said determining an alternate configuration for  
2 said product in accordance with said at least one non-binding attribute includes at least  
3 one of the following:

4 selecting an alternate configuration permitted in said order;  
5 determining a component that can replace another component in the  
6 product and satisfy the non-binding attribute;  
7 determining a component that can replace another component in said  
8 product and satisfy said non-binding attribute;  
9 receiving a notification of a selection of an alternative component for said  
10 product;  
11 receiving consent to exchange said initial configuration with said alternate  
12 configuration;  
13 providing a notification of availability of said alternate configuration;  
14 receiving a request to exchange said initial configuration with said  
15 alternate configuration;  
16 providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that  
17 satisfies said non-binding attribute and is usable in said alternate configuration;  
18 providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that is  
19 unavailable for use in said initial configuration;  
20 providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that is  
21 available for use in said alternate configuration; and  
22 confirming ability of a component to satisfy said non-binding attribute.

1 30. The method of claim 27, wherein said fulfilling said order in accordance with said  
2 alternate configuration includes at least one of the following:

3 providing a notification that said order is provided in accordance with said  
4 alternate configuration;

5           providing a notification that said product is provided in accordance with  
6           said alternate configuration;  
7           building said product in accordance with said alternate configuration but  
8           not said initial configuration;  
9           providing said product in accordance with said alternate configuration but  
10          not said initial configuration;  
11          providing said order in accordance with said alternate configuration but  
12          not said initial configuration; and  
13          using a component with said product that is included in said alternate  
14          configuration but not said initial configuration.

1   31.    The method of claim 27, wherein said order comprises a legal contract

1   32.    The method of claim 27, further comprising:  
2           determining said non-binding attribute.

1   33.    The method of claim 27, further comprising:  
2           adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging  
3           said initial configuration with said alternate configuration.

1   34.    The method of claim 27, wherein said order specifies different prices for different  
2           configurations of said product.

1   35.    A method for completing an order for a product, comprising:  
2           establishing an order involving a first component, wherein said order  
3           includes a non-binding attribute associated with said first component;  
4           determining a shortage of an amount of said first component needed to for  
5           said order;

6                   determining a second component that satisfies said non-binding attribute  
7                   for said order; and  
8                   exchanging said first component with said second component for said  
9                   order.

1   36.    The method of claim 35, wherein said establishing an order involving a first  
2   component includes at least one of the following:

3                   providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding  
4                   attribute;  
5                   receiving an order for a product that includes said first component;  
6                   allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product,  
7                   wherein said first component is one of said plurality of components;  
8                   allowing a customer to select said non-binding attribute;  
9                   providing a notification to a customer regarding said first component and  
10                  said second component and receiving consent from said customer to said non-  
11                  binding attribute;  
12                  providing a notification to a customer regarding a component and  
13                  receiving consent from the customer to use said component in said order;  
14                  providing a notification to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute  
15                  and receiving consent from said customer to use the non-binding attribute in the  
16                  order;  
17                  providing at least two options regarding a component and allowing a  
18                  customer to select from among the two options; and  
19                  providing a request to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute  
20                  associated with said first component.

1   37.    The method of claim 35, wherein said determining a shortage of an amount of  
2   said first component needed for said order includes at least one of the following:

3 receiving a second order involving said first component, fulfillment of  
4 which prevents fulfillment of said order with said first component;  
5 determining availability of an amount of said first component needed to  
6 fulfill said order;  
7 determining that said order cannot be partially or completely filled due to  
8 defects detected in said first component;  
9 determining that a change in price for said first component makes it  
10 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
11 determining that a change in price for a second component makes it  
12 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
13 determining that a change in projected supply for said first component  
14 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
15 determining that a change in projected supply for a second component  
16 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
17 determining that a projected change in price for said first component  
18 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
19 determining that a projected change in price for a second component  
20 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;  
21 determining that an amount of said first component needed for said order  
22 exceeds an amount of said first component that is available for said order; and  
23 determining that an amount of said first component needed for said order  
24 exceeds an amount of said first component in inventory.

1 38. The method of claim 35, wherein said order comprises a legal contract.

1 39. The method of claim 35, further comprising:  
2 determining said non-binding attribute.

1 40. The method of claim 35, further comprising:

2 adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging  
3 said first component with said second component.

1 41. The method of claim 35, wherein said order specifies different prices for different  
2 configurations of a product associated with said order.

1 42. A system for facilitating an order for at least one product, comprising:  
2 a memory;  
3 a communication port; and  
4 a processor connected to said memory and said communication port, said  
5 processor being operative to:  
6 establish an order for a product, wherein said order includes a first  
7 component associated with said product and said order includes a non-  
8 binding attribute associated with said first component;  
9 determine a second component that satisfies said non-binding  
10 attribute for said order; and  
11 exchange said first component with said second component in said  
12 order.

1 43. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for facilitating an  
2 order for at least one product, comprising:  
3 first instructions for creating an order for a product, wherein said order  
4 includes a first component associated with said product and said order includes a  
5 non-binding attribute associated with said first component;  
6 second instructions for identifying a second component that satisfies said  
7 non-binding attribute for said order; and  
8 third instructions for allowing use of said first component with said second  
9 component in said order.